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Clews, Henry

Address at a reception
given by the members...

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Address

BY

HENRY CLEWS, Ph. D., LL. D.

AT A RECEPTION GIVEN BY THE MEMBERS ON THE
OCCASION OF THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
FOUNDING OF THE UNION LEAGUE CLUB, FEBRUARY
SIXTH, NINETEEN HUNDRED AND THIRTEEN

In Honor of

THE FIVE SURVIVING FOUNDERS

HENRY BEDLOW, CHARLES LANIER, HORACE-W. FULLER
SALEM T. RUSSELL, and HENRY CLEWS

AND

THE OFFICERS OF THE CLUB FROM ITS COMMENCEMENT

29 Mar. 1915 MS

Address by Henry Clews

At the reception given by the members on the occasion of the
Fiftieth Anniversary of the founding of the
Union League Club, February 6, 1913.

IN HONOR OF THE FIVE SURVIVING FOUNDERS, HENRY BEDLOW, CHARLES
LANIER, HORACE W. FULLER, SALEM T. RUSSELL and HENRY CLEWS
AND THE OFFICERS OF THE CLUB FROM ITS COMMENCEMENT.

It is a high honor, deeply appreciated, to be called upon to speak at the semi-centennial of this historic Club, representing as I do the five surviving charter members, and yet I confess to feelings of deep chagrin that you by this act are giving my age such wide publicity! Indeed I do not know how you can reconcile yourselves with the public as gentlemen of the highest veracity, knowing, as you probably do, that my age is only forty-six,—and upwards!

During all my active life, and more especially in the last twenty-five years, I have been known as "the young man of Wall Street." Many have tried to guess my age, but they have missed it by about twenty-five years—I won't say which way. Now you advertise me as one of the charter members of the Club, and that, too, on its fiftieth anniversary. So I'm afraid the public will immediately commence guessing again, this time not missing it by more than fifteen or twenty years.

A man cannot be considered old who never has an anniversary. It is only on one of these celebrations of certain events that we are "pulled up short" and made to think how the years are flying. Personally I stopped having anniversaries when I was forty-six.

Forced, however, to look back by this celebration of yours—remember it's not mine—I would never have suggested such a chance to have my age, and that of my other four colleague charter members guessed at. Being *forced* I say, I admit that the memories are varied and the emotions mingled as I think of the fifty years of stirring history that have gone.

Man's clearest view of life, and of the things which life has brought is always best obtained through the perspective of the years. Isolated events, which seem nothing but indeterminate splashes upon life's canvas, show a wonderful harmony of design when viewed in relation to the things that go before and those that follow after. So, looking back through this perspective of our history, we all can see how the isolated events of this Club's organization, unmeaning then to the thousands of this busy city, have blended so perfectly with the full design which we believe God had not only for our great city, but also for the nation which we love.

I well remember those days of 1863 when the Union League Club was first proposed by Prof. Wolcott Gibbs and so nobly seconded by George T. Strong, the Rev. Henry W. Bellows and Cornelius R. Agnew, all of the Sanitary Commission. The Union League Club may indeed be said to be born of the Sanitary Commission. Frederick L. Olmsted, its secretary, was the first one with whom Prof. Gibbs consulted, though his name does not appear in any of the calls for the organization, his duties in Washington as Commission Secretary keeping him away from the city during the time of the early meetings of the association.

Four other names, in addition to those already mentioned, were added to the first call: George C. Anthon, George T. Allen, George Gibbs (a brother of the Professor) and William J. Hoppin. The initial meeting was held at the home of Prof. Gibbs, 59 East 29th Street, on the thirtieth of January 1863, but it was not until the second meeting at the home of George T. Strong, 74 East 31st Street, that the organization was perfected and the Union League Club fully launched on the historic sixth of February, 1863.

The original intention of the founders was to call the organization "The National Club," as it was instituted to help the National Government in the great crisis then upon

it; but it was afterwards decided to call it "The Union League Club" as being more appropriate, as we stood in those trying days,—when some were striving to make two nations out of one,—as we have always stood, and always will stand, for "The Union, one and indivisible, now and forever!"

Scripture says: "By their fruits ye shall know them." This is certainly a truth filled with most significant and pertinent suggestion measured by which we as a Club may justly claim the world's recognition; but it is nevertheless true that the seed must first be planted before the fruit appears, and it is to the seedtime that I ask your attention before we arrogate to ourselves the fruits of noble effort and achievement.

The founders felt that this was not to be a mere social organization: there were vast issues at stake, great principles for which to stand, tremendous governmental policies that needed germinating. So, in the first meeting of the Union League Club, three seeds were planted from which has sprung a glorious fruitage of peace, prosperity and love, which makes all parts of the nation,—once dissevered and disorganized by bloodshed and internecine strife,—now loyal and devoted, the one to the other, and to the flag that waves above us all.

These seeds are found in the three great principles laid down in the Articles of Association, as they were called, which are as follows:

First.—The condition of membership shall be *absolute and unqualified loyalty* to the Government of the *United States*, and unwavering support of its efforts for the suppression of the rebellion.

Second.—The primary object of the Association shall be to discountenance and rebuke by moral and social influence all *disloyalty* to the Federal Government, and to that end the members will use every proper means in public and private.

Third.—We pledge ourselves by every means in our power, collectively and individually, to resist to the *utmost* every attempt against the territorial integrity of the nation.

These strong and stirring words, used in the very formation of the Club, can easily be understood when we realize the trying times in which they were uttered. Sumter had fallen. For two years the country had been in the midst of

a most bloody struggle, a struggle that set not only the North against the South, but State against State, brother against brother, father against son—when indeed, Scripture was being most terribly fulfilled, which says, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household." "States rights" was the shibboleth that was dividing hearts and homes, communities and States, and all the nation. In the midst of the discouragements and reverses of the first two years of the war a feeling of disloyalty had grown apace throughout all the North, and was being most particularly shown in the State of New York, and here in the city itself.

Horatio Seymour had been elected Governor of New York and at his election had declared the war unconstitutional, doing everything in his power to thwart the Government in its efforts to put down rebellion and disloyalty.

Fernando Wood, Mayor of the city at the beginning of the war, had asserted that the dissolution of the Union seemed inevitable and it was proper that New York should be prepared to declare herself a free city, independent of national or State affairs; and an organization was secretly formed with a view to carrying out the proposed act of treason.

Here then were "States rights" run wild, "States rights" that some would apply ever to cities and communities, "States rights" that would have turned back the clock of time a thousand years and put us in the midst of the semi-barbarism of the Middle Ages, when every man was a vengeful, murderous Ishmaelite with his hand against every man and every man's hand against him.

It was to grapple with this treason and make it powerless and contemptible that the Union League Club was formed. As John Jay, one of our earlier Presidents, rightly said, "It was to settle forever this controversy that these Articles of Association especially the last, were approved"; and from the start, the power of the Club was felt more and more until New York became the national centre of patriotic sentiment.

These were by no means mere idle words. Called as I was at the time by Salmon P. Chase, then Secretary of the Treasury, to become one of the financial agents of the Government, I know how the sentiment here, molded by the efforts of the Union League Club, changed so completely that we succeeded by strenuous efforts in disposing of hundreds of

millions of dollars worth of bonds issued to furnish means to carry on the Civil War. A man's patriotism cannot always be gauged by his pocketbook because, sometimes he lacks a pocketbook! But when a man, who has a pocketbook, is willing to risk his all in the cause he loves, that man's patriotism bears the highest mark of confidence and self-sacrifice.

No wonder that with such principles the Union League Club immediately flourished! No wonder that with such high motives it at once attracted to its ranks the noblest and the best of our citizens! To be a member of the Union League Club was to be a patriot, and marked a man's loyalty and devotion as absolutely unimpeachable!

Look over with me to-night the long list of those who have been with us in the past: how all our hearts thrill at the mention of such names as Cyrus W. Field, William E. Dodge, Franklin H. Delano, Thomas W. Ogden, Charles H. Marshall, Robert B. Minturn, Henry R. Winthrop, the Rev. Dr. Roswell D. Hitchcock, Charles W. Elliott, James F. DePeyster, E. B. Youmans, Adrian Iselin, Col. Legrand B. Cannon, John Jay of illustrious memory, and scores of others. "There were giants in those days!" These were no mere pigmies, these were men four square, men of the highest integrity, of the noblest patriotism, who were willing to do anything and dare everything for the cause they loved so well; and we to-day must have the highest ambitions, the noblest aims, if we would prove ourselves worthy successors of such glorious sires.

"By their fruits ye shall know them." "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" Out of such a patriotic band as this you can look only for patriotic deeds and such were soon in evidence. The same year that the Club was organized a Committee was appointed to write to Governor Seymour asking the privilege of raising and equipping a regiment of colored troops. The Governor, lukewarm in his loyalty, wrote back that he had no jurisdiction in the matter, which was known of course to be absolutely untrue. Nothing daunted, the Committee immediately wrote to the Secretary of War asking permission of the Federal Government, which was granted at once, and within a few months the 20th Regiment United States Colored Troops was organized, equipped, drilled, and sent to the front; all through the united efforts of the Union League Club.

Not only this, but so great was the enthusiasm of the Club, and so fast did contributions pour in that it was found possible to equip and send to the front in swift succession no less than three regiments of colored troops, each under standards of colors presented by the wives, mothers, daughters and sisters of the members of the Union League.

I well remember that day of March 5, 1864 when we assembled at the old Club House on the corner of Seventeenth Street fronting Union Square, which was our first home. The 20th Regiment which we had equipped was to go to the front, and the ladies of the club members had prepared a stand of colors to present to it. The Regiment was drawn up in front of the Club House and the standard given by the ladies in these memorable words: "When you look at this flag and rush to battle, or stand at guard beneath its sublime motto, 'God and Liberty,' remember that it is also an emblem of respect and honor from the daughters of this great metropolis to her brave champions in the field, and that they will anxiously watch your career, glorying in your heroism, ministering to you when wounded and ill, and honoring your martyrdom with benedictions and with tears."

"There were giants in those days!" Aye, and by their sides were those who, though not of giant mold in physical development, were giants in heart and mind and purpose, in sympathy and service, giants in a woman's love that o'ertops all else, and therefore I say when drinking toasts to those whom we "have loved long since and lost awhile," let us not forget to drink to the health of the "Ladies of the Union League Club!"

In the very first year, indeed, of the organization a meeting was called at the Club House to discuss the possibility of holding a fair, the proceeds of which should go to the Sanitary Commission for bettering the condition of the men at the front. The ladies were asked to take charge of this under the auspices of the Club, and they managed the fair so successfully that over a million dollars was poured into the treasury of the Sanitary Commission through their efforts.

Subsequently in November 1864, a special Thanksgiving dinner was arranged for the sailors and soldiers at the front, and a large commission appointed in which the women, though in the background, again took part, as only they know

how, when man's creature comforts need attention. Small though this may seem it nevertheless is true that it largely allayed the discouragement and homesickness of the men on the firing line, put new life and courage into them and made them the more ready to go forward through blood and battle and every one of war's dreadful vicissitudes, until victory perched upon their banners and peace came once more with outstretched wings and hovered o'er a united and prosperous nation. Therefore I say all honor to the Union League and all of its great achievements; again all honor to that glorious band of women that cheered and strengthened us when most we needed their sympathy and help.

Here then is a history that he who runs may read; a history that is emblazoned high on the annals of a nation's deeds, for ours has always been inseparably connected with the nation we love. Other clubs are proud of their social position and achievements and of these none can rejoice more than our Club, made up as it is of the first families of the city, and of men who stand highest in social influence and attainments. Yet these after all weigh light in the balance of public opinion when put against noble devotion and loyalty to great national movements and patriotic principles. It is for these our Club has stood. No mere social intercourse was its aim, though it has always stood for that friendship and fellowship that every Club should afford. Its highest aim, its noblest purpose was the "Union," for which it was named, and to which it has ever given its holiest allegiance.

Five of us alone remain of that original company; but as I look around at this great gathering I realize that we have noble successors who will always hold high the ideals on which the Union League Club was founded.

Five only of us left of that struggling little band, but two thousand more following in our footsteps! And as I look into the faces of my four comrades here, Henry Bedlow, Charles Lanier, Horace W. Fuller and Salem T. Russell, I realize that none of us can long remain to carry on the work so early committed to our care; but as I think of the two thousand others that are vigorous members of this Club, and of their integrity and devotion, I know that all the high purposes and principles for which the Club stands will be kept inviolate and secure.

There is a story found in the history of Peruvian naval affairs that tells of a custom they have each year of calling the roll of the active and retired officers of that branch of the Peruvian service. The roll is made up of the living only, save for one exception, but so high is held the name of Admiral Grau who fell in an engagement with Chile in 1879 that his name is always kept upon this yearly roll, and when it is called an officer steps forward and saluting, cries: "Absent, but accounted for. He is with the heroes!"

Fellow founders of the Union League Club, our ranks are thinning yearly. Other celebrations will yet be held, other voices take part in them, when yours and mine are silent; but whenever that may be I trust that our devotion may have been so great, our patriotism so high like those who have gone before, that our names with theirs, will ever be remembered and that some one may step forward at the mention of each of them and cry: "Absent, but accounted for. He is with the heroes!"

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